

Can Money Buy Happiness?

As Hannah Salwen found out, it can—when you give it away, that is. **BY KRISTIN LEWIS**

Hannah Salwen, 14, and her dad were driving to their large, beautiful house in Atlanta, Georgia, when they came to a red light. Looking through the window, Hannah spotted a fancy car in the next lane. Outside the other window she saw a homeless man sitting on the sidewalk. He had a sign that read: "Hungry, homeless, please help."

In that moment, something inside Hannah changed. She was haunted by the stark contrast between the luxury of the car and the poverty of the man. How many meals could be purchased for the price of that car? Hannah began pestering her family to do something to help those in need. Finally, her mother asked, jokingly, "What do you want to do—sell our house?"

That was exactly what Hannah wanted.

She convinced her family to sell their \$1.5 million dream home, move into a house half the size, and donate \$800,000 to charity. After some research, the Salwens chose to give to The Hunger

Project. The money was used to help the people of some 40 villages in Ghana.

The More You Give, the More You Get

Can money buy happiness? Certainly, having enough money for your basic needs—food, shelter, health care, clothing—brings a sense of security and safety. But increasingly, studies show that

true contentment comes not from splurging on the latest iPhone or designer jeans, but from contributing to something bigger than yourself. Volunteering to clean up parks, organizing a blood drive, or reading to an elderly neighbor makes us feel good. Some scientists believe that's because our brains are hardwired to be altruistic. Unlike stuff we buy, acts of generosity provide lasting satisfaction.

It's an idea that Hannah and her family now understand firsthand. For them, living in a smaller home brought them closer together. Their lives became more joyful and fulfilling. And they found themselves spending more time with one another, talking, connecting.

And that kind of happiness is something money just can't buy. ●



Hannah Salwen

WRITING CONTEST

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